Post 12-7-74

Cavett and the CIA: 'Routine' Clearance

By Michael Kernan

Nervous legal advisers fo the American Broadcasting Company managed to hold up a controversial Dick Cavett show about the Central Intelligence Agency long enough to thwart national press prescreening, Cavett said yesterday in New York.

The 90-minute program — scheduled to be aired at 11:30 tonight (Channel 7-WMAL) — features debate between Victor Marchetti, co-author of "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence," and two former CIA officials.

"The legal department kept wanting to know if the show was balanced," Cavett said, "and I kept telling them that htat was the whole point of it: It was a debate of the pros and cons."

Three months ago ABC-TV refused a Cavett talk show involving several radical leaders of the 60's but later rescheduled it with an added 12 minutes of comment by some conservatives as "balance." And Tuesday, when the new show was being taped, ABC legal experts were on hand.

"They said they thought it was okay," noted Cavett, "but they wanted to talk to some higher-ups first. But the higher-ups were at lunch — why didn't they watch it themselves if they were worried? — and finally they managed to diddle around until it was too late for a screening."

A belated screening was held yesterday for the New

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York press, according to Herbert Wurth of the publicity department. Wurth added that the show would go on as taped, that there were no serious problems, that getting legal clearance on shows of this nature was "a routine matter."

The two ex-CIA men were Robert Komer, former ambassador to Turkey, head of the Vietnam pacification project and now a Rand Corp. consultant, and Ray Cline, now executive director of studies for the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University. Though considerable tension was generated during the show, Cavett said, when it was over the participants seemed jovial enough.

One question was whether the CIA liquidates used up agents, as claimed by a Marchetti source from Latin America. After listening to Marchetti's second hand version of how a man died in a fake truck accident just after being retired from the CIA, Cline denied that liquidation was CIA policy.

Another issue was the extent to which the Soviet KGB may have penetrated the CIA, and Marchetti, challenged to name the high CIA official he believed to be a double agent, refused to divulge it for TV.

There were also some exchanges about the purpose of CIA, Cavett added, with the ex-agent pooh-poohing "all this cloak-and dagger stuff" which they said accounted for only a tiny percentage of agency work.

Cline, asked if President Nixon and Henry Kissinger would have made good spies, did say that both men appear inclined toward the covert and secret and that Kissinger probably would have liked to be the CIA director.

The Marchetti book was the subject of a landmark ruling in U.S. District Court this spring. Although 339 deletions had been made by the CIA before publicttion, the court restored all but 27 of the excisions. The deleted sections were not discussed on the TV show.

Cavett said he does not plan more controversial shows in the immediate future.